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Letters...

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Letters...



Letter from Ireland

The writer apologizes for the delay in forwarding this letter. He has thus missed telling in more detail of the great contribution from all over the world made to famine relief in Africa, which was masterminded by the Irish pop singer, Bob Geldof. He was congratulated and honored in many countries, especially in England where he was made a K.B.E. by Queen Elizabeth, a tribute rarely paid to a foreigner. However, he is only continuing the great tradition that the Irish give more to missionary charity per head of population than any other country, and have always been leaders in the numbers of missionaries sent abroad.

However the principal news this year concerns the National Referendum held in June to decide whether the people wanted divorce, which has always been banned by our Constitution. The Bill to be presented was short and to the point but restricted recourse to the law until a couple had been separated for five years. I have mentioned before how intense the campaign for so-called liberalization has been. Had we listened to the various and vocal opinions from the mass media, we would have thought that the result was a foregone conclusion. However our Hierarchy mobilized its forces and issued a very well argued Pastoral called "Love is for Life". This admitted the difficulties that existed in many marriages and agreed that our society had failed to be as supportive as it should be. At the same time it was made quite clear that the cure for marital breakdown does not lie in the divorce courts. It is true to say that we have many different associations of well-meaning people trying to help in these matters, but they lack coordination, continuity and financial backing. The

Bishops told us to follow our consciences, and the Irish people did this in June by voting 63% against divorce, leaving us the only country in the European Economic Community that has no legislation to allow it. An analysis of the voting showed that the city people's opinions were almost equally divided but the farming community and also the small business people came out strongly for the preservation of marriage. One can see here the greater influence of the clergy in the less populated areas, and also a sense of protection of the rights of inheritance of property. Because of our history of land troubles and eviction in previous centuries, the rights of property owners have been very well catered for in the laws of the country since independence. One can easily see the difficulty of families of second marriages competing for an inheritance. However I am quite sure we have not heard the end of this problem. One immediate result has been to widen the grounds permitting annulment of marriage. This is, of course, no solution, as annulment declares that no marriage existed.

1985/6 will be remembered by the medical profession as the year of the first heart and liver transplant done in Dublin hospitals (the Mater and St. Vincent's). This may give the impression that Irish surgery is behind the times, but this is not true as we only lacked the resources. Furthermore, we only have a population of $3\frac{1}{2}$ million, which reduces the number of cases requiring these procedures. Nevertheless we are very proud. Also we had the first in vitro fertilization performed successfully in St. James's Hospital. This latter raised a storm of medico-ethical protest and the subsequent debate has led to a suspension of the procedure pro tem. Those who need this

facility, or those who wish for abortion, will still have to cross the Irish Sea to Great Britain, the only limitation being the expense involved. We note, however, a slight reduction in the number of Irish women registered as having had abortions in England. This may be due to the increased number of patients being sterilized or the greater availability of contraception. The birth rate in this country is still the highest in Europe, although declining somewhat in the past five to six years. We remain in positive population balance, unlike, e.g., West Germany or Great Britain.

The problem of the moment is that our health services have suffered a considerable reduction in funding because of the continuing recession. This has forced many of our hospitals to close some of their wards because of lack of resources. The first consequence of this is fewer jobs available for young doctors and nurses. The nurses, however, do very well abroad, being especially welcome in Australia, the United States and Canada and, of course, in Great Britain. Young doctors are not so fortunate, as at least 50% of them must emigrate to find work in a world where jobs are now scarcer. Traditionally, most of our graduates went to Great Britain, but also to the United States and Canada. These countries still welcome us for specialized training, but it is difficult to obtain permanent posts. An off-shoot of all this has been an on-going discontent with pay and conditions of work in the group of non-consultant hospital doctors. They have even threatened strike action. Unfortunately the present Minister is intransigent on this matter, and will not pay what we would consider reasonable overtime, nor will he allow sufficient free time for study, but as in all things, compromise will have to be achieved, if only because politicians do not stay in office forever and young doctors become senior.

In conclusion, I offer a statistic which states that 6.9% of all third level students in Ireland study Medical Science. This is the third lowest in the European Economic Community, the Netherlands being slightly lower at 6.2% and Italy being highest at 22.6%. Over the past 10 years, the Irish intake of medical students has

been reduced from 400 plus to 250 per annum, but even this more than exceeds the required number of graduates to replace deaths and retirements in Ireland. It is sad to think that these young graduates whose education has cost so much cannot be guaranteed a future in their own country, especially since the number of patients per doctor in Ireland is quite high when compared to other countries. A number of our doctors and nurses go to work in the Third World, being funded by charitable organizations, but this is not sufficient to make a permanent reduction in the overall numbers who seek employment.

— Robert F. O'Donoghue, K.G.,
F.R.C.O.G.

Pharmacist-Priest Writes

To the Editor:

The press claims Catholics are divided on contraception: some say it's right, some say it's wrong. But this is not exactly true. Catholic theologians agree that contraceptives in principle are wrong, but some say they are all right to use in hardship cases, while others say they are not. However, the Pope in *Humanae Vitae* said contraceptives are always wrong, *intrinsically wrong*. That means they mechanically change the purpose of the act itself from love and new babies to fun and no babies. But the theologians who disagree with the pope deny that anything is intrinsically evil. This forces them to conclude that you can do *anything*, given the right circumstances. I should like to ask these theologians: When is *rape* ok? When is *child abuse* ok? Or *arson*? Or *perjury*? Or what circumstances make *adultery* all right? Find me circumstances that make these ok and I'll grant you, then, that *hardship* makes contraceptives ok.

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